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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER

A POLITE WOOD.



AHOGANY is a prince among woods!

And why?

Not alone for its beauty (that would make it a princess), for its durability, its freedom from atmospheric influence, the permanence of its brilliancy, and the unequalled grace of its grain.

I cannot understand how any rich man with the desire to have his house artistic as well as elaborate, can lose sight of the enormous advantages possessed by mahogany if only in its decorative phase.

Let me, briefly, revert to the process of preparing this wood for practical use in the construction of wainscotings, furniture, and the numerous other purposes to which it is applied. My excuse for this is that the comprehension, even superficial, of how and why certain things are done often gives them a much brighter complexion and an entirely different aspect.

When the enormous logs are landed from the numerous points whence mahogany originates, they are carefully examined by an expert, and those promising the showiest and most elaborate grain are marked with a cross upon either end. I say "an expert," for it requires an experienced eye to distinguish a difference, and especially an advantage, in the forbidden exterior of the ill-shapen masses lying about the yard. The ordinary observer would find it difficult to muster sufficient imagination to discover in this raw condition the beautiful results that follow the lead of a saw and a chisel.

The popular application of any wood is in the form of veneer, and to produce veneer is no different in mahogany than in the multitude of other lumber. It is brought forth by a delicate circular saw or by a gigantic razor; the first rips off the thin slice, the latter shaves it off. With the saw the life of the wood is preserved, its vitality is retained, it has a freshness and a snap when it comes from the crisp cut that makes it appear rich and bright without further manipulation. The slicing or shaving, however, has a somewhat different effect. In order to soften the tough wood that the knife may plunge into it without producing the ragged edge of a rough, uncouth incision, a volume of steam is thrown upon the log and the shaving comes forth from the keen edge curled and smoking. This unavoidably kills, or at least wounds, the freshness of the veneer's beauty and it requires no preternaturally quick eye to discover.

In its natural condition, as the wood comes from the saw, whether it be in the delicate veneer or in cumbersome planks, it is light in color and has a richness that Nature invariably bestows in some measure to the most ordinary of her products and defies the keenest effort of art to successfully imitate. Finished in this condition, varnished in the shade and tone of its growth, mahogany can have no competitor in the taste and fancy of men, for it is infinitely above and unapproachably beyond any other decorative material extant.

And right here is where the unsuspecting householder has been deceived.

Instead of resting satisfied with the innate beauty of the wood, injudicious manufacturers have stained it, darkened it, muddled it in other words, robbed it of its sparkle, and given it a heavy, funereal semblance that is foreign to it and therefore disfiguring.

And why has that been done?

Solely so as to make it possible for whitewood, maple, birch and anything else that may come that way, to be dyed and painted to the same color that mahogany has been artificially brought; where both are stained the false is not so readily discovered.

There is a piano exhibited at this time in a prominent establishment on Fifth Avenue, made from unstained mahogany; it is rubbed down in its natural condition, and I refer the doubter to that example and a comparison between it and others as to the wisdom of my views. The minutest beauty in its most delicate fibre is apparent, it stands forth as though it were the particular point that was to give tone to the entire work; the grain may be traced from its source to its terminal, every virtue in it is clean, sharp and incisive. It shows what the wood is capable of, it does not show what paint and stain may accomplish.

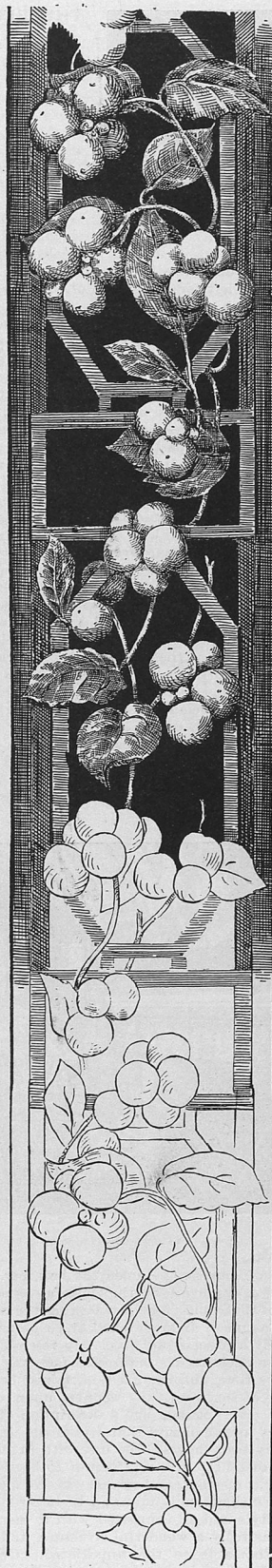
The dissatisfaction brought about by the rapid degeneration and deterioration of the imitation mahogany, has been a powerful factor in the lessening use of the real wood. Where the stain wears out and the surface becomes dingy and streaky in the false, it grows in depth and richness in the genuine, it improves with age as does the solid old English oak, and with advancing years it takes on an ever recurring freshness and luxuriance.

Another element that has worked against the permanence of mahogany is the price at which it has been held, a price needlessly high and exorbitantly so; it costs no more to the dealer than does walnut, but when he discovered its beauty and the impression that beauty had made on the more refined buyers, he injudiciously exaggerated the figure and drove away a trade he might otherwise have cultivated.

Of the furniture coming from large Western manufactories mahogany plays a very small part; this is one of the drops that with others creates the deluge flooding the wood in popular estimation. And the reason for it is found in the shortsightedness of the Eastern dealer and the misconception of facts on the part of the Westerner. The Eastern man claims a high price, the Western points to his distance from the source of supply and thereby imagines the existence of an advantage in favor of his Eastern competitor, losing sight meanwhile of the cheaper plant and labor he himself enjoys, which is an advantage the trade in this locality do not possess and can never attain.

As a wood that is free from the dangers of warping or twisting, that is in itself attractive and showy, that requires the aid of no foreign addition to give it force and power decoratively, that can be made use of without the delay of seasoning, that has sufficient character to wear without tiring the eye, mahogany is the one, sole wood combining these desirable qualities and being in all respects the best and the most reliable material for the construction of furniture or the adornment of a wall or ceiling.

A. CURTIS BOND.



DOOR STILE, BY HARRY A. DEANE.